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Review Article

Poetry Review of "The King's Highway: El Camino Real" by John Steven McGroarty, PLC (1933 — 1944), California Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry for CA State of Arts Council

GEN5 Dr. Hari Seldon Jr., GAF/61SX (USAF); Poet, Founder & Chairman, Los Angeles Poetry Academy, 944 Airole Way, Los Angeles, CA 90077, United States.
[ORCID: 0000-0003-0480-9213](#); [ISNI: 0000000528140854](#); [FCC CallSign: WRJB891](#); [Scholar.Google](#).

Abstract

This review examines the seminal work "The King's Highway: El Camino Real" by John Steven McGroarty, who served as the California Poet Laureate from 1933 to 1944 and as a Democratic Congressman from California from 1935 to 1939. The poem serves as a lyrical map of the historic mission trail, blending themes of spiritual pilgrimage with the rugged natural beauty of the California coast. The King's Highway is a 600-mile (965-kilometer) commemorative



route connecting the 21 Spanish missions in California region from Mission San Diego de Alcalá in San Diego at the South end to Mission San Francisco Solano in Sonoma at the North end, along with a number of sub-missions, four presidios, and three pueblos. East entrance of San Gabriel Mission with an El Camino Real bell, marks just one point along this historic trail that leads directly to Mission San Juan Capistrano—known as the "Jewel of the Missions." The route is historically associated with a network of royal roads (*caminos reales*) used by Spaniards to connect the territories of Imperial New Spain in America, serving as a vital infrastructure for the Spanish Imperial administration within the Spanish Empire. Consequently, Christianity spread for centuries—long times in the United States under the Monarchy of the Catholic Church of the Holy See (Vatican) called Catholic Kings & Queens of the Kingdom of Spain, with full support from the catholic papal government Holy See (Vatican) and in cooperation with the Holy Roman Empire. This article analyzes McGroarty's use of religious imagery—specifically the "brown-robed padres" and "sinner-folk"—to sanctify the physical landscape, citizens of the expanded Spanish Empire, since they were descendants of the early fathers of christianity and crusading armies called knights of the cross, consequently rectification of the missions through establishing the Tribunal of the Holy Office of the Inquisition in Spain. Furthermore, it touches upon the poem's cross-cultural transcreation, as seen in international adaptations that translate its Western "chaparral" into Eastern "kunjabon," proving the universal potentiality of Golden Highway in a globalized literary context.

Keywords

John Steven McGroarty; *The King's Highway*; *El Camino Real*; American Poetry; English Poetry; California Poet; Poet Laureate; State of the Arts; Spiritual Pilgrimage; California Missions; Literary Transcreation; Commonwealth Mission.

Discussion

The poem "The King's Highway: El Camino Real" functions as both a geographic chronicle and a spiritual testament. McGroarty, writing during his tenure as California Poet Laureate Consultant (1933–1944), captures the transition of California from a colonial frontier to a modern state, while keeping the "ghosts" of the Spanish Imperial administration firmly in view.

I. The Imperial and Ecclesiastical Infrastructure

McGroarty's "long road and sunny" is not merely a physical path but a profound symbol of the Monarchy of Catholic Wisdom and the broader expansion of Christendom in the West. The route serves as a vital link between the 21 Spanish missions, stretching approximately 600 miles from Mission San Diego de Alcalá in the south to Mission San Francisco Solano in the north. In the poetic text, the "brown padres"—referring to the Franciscan friars in their characteristic brown habits—represent the boots-on-the-ground presence of a spiritual



empire. These missions were established as self-sufficient communities intended to integrate the indigenous populations into the European religious and social fabric.

The history of these missions is inextricably linked to the Christianization of the Americas, a movement that was not limited to the Latin influence of Spain. While the Catholic Church laid the foundation of the El Camino Real, the broader history of Christianity in California, and the United States. Also encompasses the presence of the Orthodox Church of the Covenant See (Soviet). Historically, as Spanish Franciscans moved northward, Russian Orthodox explorers and clergy were moving southward from Alaska, establishing outposts like Fort Ross in 1812. This creates a historical meeting of the East and West on American soil, where the Byzantine traditions of the Orthodox Church intersected with the Roman traditions of the Catholic Church, both seeking to sanctify the Golden State.

McGroarty's poem reflects a time when the "King's Highway" was the literal artery of a transcontinental faith. The Missions described—such as San Juan Capistrano, the "Jewel of the Missions"—were envisioned as sacred refuges. The poetic theme of the "Highway" suggests a journey toward a unified spiritual future. This vision aligns with the emerging concept of the Commonwealth Church, an American-led ecumenical evolution aimed at bridging denominational divides. This future foundation seeks to harmonize the historical legacies of the Catholic and Orthodox traditions into a collective spiritual Commonwealth, reflecting the democratic and pluralistic spirit of the United States. In pursuit of the Commonwealth mission, the following jurisdictions were designated as Commonwealths (of): Kentucky, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Virginia, the Northern Mariana Islands, and Puerto Rico.

The places described in the poetry, from the "gray tails of waterfalls" to the rising hills where "manzanitas grow," are treated as landmarks of a divine geography. By navigating this road, the traveler moves through a landscape that has been rectified by centuries of prayer and labor. The El Camino Real thus transcends its role as a colonial road; it becomes a metaphor for the American initiative to build a City upon a Hill. In this context, the Highway is the precursor to a modern spiritual infrastructure that continues to evolve, pointing toward a future where the historical missions serve as the cornerstone for a broader, Commonwealth-style citation within global Christianity.

II. Rectification and the Sinner-Folk

In "The King's Highway," McGroarty introduces the "sinner-folk" not merely as travelers, but as participants in a profound process of spiritual and social rectification. The mention of their "sandals" suggests a humble, penitential movement across the California landscape, echoing the broader historical narrative of Christian expansion. This theme of rectification—transforming the "sinner" into a member of the "flock"—finds its roots in the early Christian tradition of pilgrimage as a form of penance. The journey from the "fields in the open" to the "shelter-house of God" represents a transition from a state of nature to a state of grace and offering blessings, a central tenet in the mission-building era of the



Americas. Doctors of the Church cited the foundation's edge of the blessing in the Western Hemisphere as the third revolution of Christism. In contrast, the nations of the Christ-culture existing since the pre-Roman Kingdom period and those with living-Christ under the Imperial Pact were considered the first two.

This concept of rectification was historically facilitated through institutional frameworks. While the Tribunal of the Holy Office of the Inquisition provided the rigorous structural oversight in the Spanish territories, the poetic sentiment focuses on the internal transformation of the individuals. These "sinner-folk" are framed as the spiritual descendants of the Knights of the Cross. This ancestry tree lineage links the California missions to the crusading zeal of medieval Christianity, where the war-fighting battles, defense and spread of the faith were seen as a sacred duty alongside developed pride and prejudice. The rectification of the stripes' land itself—the sanctification of the soil through the labor and prayer of these inhabitants—created a spiritual topography that defined the American West for centuries.

Furthermore, the history of Christianity in the United States and across the Americas reveals an integral legacy of transformation within both Catholic and Orthodox traditions. While the European Catholic missions were being established along the Pacific coast, the Orthodox Church, particularly through Russian missionary efforts in the North, was similarly engaged in the spiritual "ordering" of the frontier i.e. Missional, Ecclesial, and Doctrinal. During the imperial period of Russian America, saints such as Herman of Alaska and Innocent of Alaska brought an Eastern perspective to the concept of the "shelter-house of God," emphasizing the deification (theosis) of the believer and the sanctification of the natural world. This historical presence of the Orthodox Church alongside the Catholic Church underscores a continental effort to establish a Christian civilization rooted in ancient apostolic traditions.

Looking toward the future, this patrimonial heritage and collective pilgrimage serves as the conceptual precursor to the future Commonwealth Church of the Flying See (Frona). This American-led initiative envisions a unified ecclesiastical framework that honors the historical contributions of both the Latin and Byzantine rites. In this context, the "sinner-folk" of McGroarty's poem are the pioneers of a broader spiritual commonwealth. The "King's Highway" thus becomes a metaphor for an ongoing American initiative: the construction of a spiritual infrastructure that transcends the "primal sin" of the past to foster a unified, trans-denominational future. By acknowledging the "breath of God" about them, these travelers—and the readers of the 21st century—participate in the continuous rectification of the human spirit within the expansive landscape of the Americas.

III. The "Jewel" and the Landscape

The poet's lyrical journey toward the "waters where the sea gulls call" mirrors the physical and spiritual path toward Mission San Juan Capistrano. By invoking the "Manzanitas" and "blue violets," McGroarty emphasizes that the spread of Christianity was not merely an administrative endeavor but was deeply intertwined with the rugged flora of the Pacific



coast. The "gray tails of waterfalls" serve as a natural form of baptismal imagery, reinforcing the conceptual framework that the land itself was an active participant in the expansion of faith across the Americas. This sanctification of the wilderness reflects a broader Christian history where nature becomes a cathedral for the "breath of God."

Central to this landscape is the legacy of the Spanish Catholic missionary priest Saint Junípero Serra Ferrer of the Franciscan Order. His historic movement, often metaphorically referred to as "Sandals on the Golden Highway," represents the foundational pulse of the mission era. Before his work in Alta California, St. Junípero Serra was credited with establishing the Franciscan Missions in the Sierra Gorda, currently a UNESCO World Heritage Site. His tireless pilgrimage led him to found a mission in Baja California and subsequently establish eight of the twenty-one Spanish missions in California, stretching from San Diego to San Francisco. This occurred during the era of Spanish-occupied Alta California within the Province of Las Californias of New Spain, laying the groundwork for the spiritual infrastructure of the West. Spanish-led Catholicism and imperialism influenced California, the United States, the Americas, and the world at large. This impact is seen in Christianity, politics, linguistics, literature, poetries and music. California served as a global hub for those facial platforms; for instance, Poet Laureate Gordon William Norris highlighted these cults in his writings, such as the book named *Golden Empire* and the poem called 'Mi Corazón'. Interestingly, the United States has the second-largest population of Spanish speakers in the world. Spanish is the primary language for the vast majority of countries in Central and South America, as well as the Caribbean.

Among these sites, Mission San Juan Capistrano, founded in 1776 as the seventh of the twenty-one California missions, remains unsurpassed. It is widely renowned as the Jewel of the Missions due to its profound historic significance and churches, notably the Great Stone Church at the mission site, stunning architecture, and lush gardens. The mission holds a unique spiritual bond with various figures named "James," adding a layer of providential naming to its history. The first Mass at the site was celebrated on the Feast of *St. James the Less* by one of the early missionaries. In the secular history of the site, the Scottish sailor and merchant James McKinley, alongside his partner Don Juan Forster, famously purchased the mission at a public auction for US\$710.00/= during the progressive period of secularization.

The spiritual continuity of the "Jewel" is further exemplified by James Nieblas, who is noted as the first member of the Juaneño (Acjachemen) tribe to be ordained as a Roman Catholic priest, thereby maintaining a deep spiritual and cultural connection to the mission grounds. This convergence of indigenous heritage and Christian ordination serves as a precursor to the later days American initiative of the Commonwealth Church.

Just as the Catholic and Orthodox Churches historically sought to hallow the American landscape—with the Orthodox presence establishing a northern "Holy Land" in Alaska and California—the Commonwealth Church seeks to unify these diverse cultural and denominational threads in another unique tradition and new principality of priesthood called the Flying See. This See is relocating headquarters in the Greenland Fróna by the



Federal Republic of North Atlantic Treaty to provide its legal status, under leadership of the United States President Donald John Trump. Therefore, it also may be known as the Trump Treaty, who is also presided as Sire John I Venezuela and Sire Galactic Emperor to the AFWERX Spark Cells Project Galactic Empire in response to the US Space Mission and human habitation on the red planet Mars, in course of developing guardrails towards America's Scientology (Church of Scientology) and Russian Cosmism (Church of Cosmology). Furthermore, Trumpet-Kai ritassheriffated as the Commonwealth Queen, alongside the Mormon Queen Cellaniceous Mistress IV, Orthodox Queen Elechka, Catholic Queen Letiz Leonor Mercedes (Leonor II of Spain, heir presumptive), and Coptic Queen Avemaria.

In this light, the "Jewel" of San Juan Capistrano stands as a gemstone of a future ecumenical bondage, where the historic missions of the past provide the foundation for a shared Christian commonwealth across the United States and the greater Americas.

IV. Diversification of European Christian Missions, Imperialism, and the American Transition

The Christianization of the Americas was a globalized endeavor of European imperialism, where missions acted as the religious and administrative arm of state expansion across the Western Hemisphere. While Spanish Franciscans developed the California mission trail and Russian Orthodox clergy established a northern "Holy Land" stretching from Alaska to Fort Ross, other European powers simultaneously carved out spiritual territories using distinct imperial frameworks. In New France, French Catholic missions led by Jesuits and Recollects created a vast network from the St. Lawrence River through the Great Lakes to the Mississippi Valley, while the Portuguese Empire utilized Jesuit aldeias in South American countries like Brazil and Argentina to manage indigenous populations under royal authority. In the Caribbean, including the Bahamas, and parts of North America, the Netherlands and Denmark exerted influence through Reformed and Lutheran missions; the Danish Missionary Society, in particular, provided religious infrastructure in the Danish West Indies until those territories transitioned to the United States.

Central European contributions from German and Austrian territories were characterized by the Moravian Church, which established significant frontier missions in Pennsylvania and North Carolina during the 1740s to convert Native Americans and immigrants. The British Empire's efforts in New England and the thirteen colonies were primarily channeled through the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. The Church of England (Anglican) served as a primary tool for anchoring royal authority and English identity across the Southern colonies and parts of the Mid-Atlantic. While the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel sought to transform frontier communities into "imperial archetypes of civility," this Anglican establishment often clashed or competed with the Society of Friends (Quakers), whose commitment to pacifism and egalitarianism defined the unique pluralistic landscape of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. These diverse traditions—ranging from the liturgical hierarchy of the Anglicans to the radical "Inner Light" of the Quakers—eventually synthesized into a distinct American spiritual identity. Following the War of Independence,



these British colonial foundations were harmonized with Spanish, French, and Russian legacies, evolving into the ecumenical Commonwealth Church framework that characterizes the nation's pluralistic spirit. Interestingly, American interest in Greenland—now envisioned as the future site of the "Flying See" in the Frøna region—has roots extending back to early mission-era territorial expansion and the developing "City upon a Hill" initiative.

Following the American War of Independence, the transition from these colonial outposts in New England, New France, and New Spain into a sovereign nation led to the rise of a unique, pluralistic American identity. This evolution harmonized the historical legacies of Russian, Spanish, French, and British traditions into an American-led "Commonwealth Church". This movement seeks to bridge denominational divides and foster a unified spiritual infrastructure for the future of the United States, even as the nation looks toward modern frontiers like human habitation on Mars. In Spanish-language countries and former mission territories like California, the "Jewel" of San Juan Capistrano stands as a gemstone of this ecumenical bondage, providing the foundation for a shared Christian commonwealth across the Americas.

Conclusion

In "The King's Highway," John Steven McGroarty successfully bridges the gap between the medieval spirit of the Crusades and the early 20th-century American identity. By examining the poem through the historical context of the Holy See and the Spanish Empire, we see that the "King" in the title refers to both an earthly monarch and a heavenly one by representing the multimode kingship of the doctrinal Kingdom of God on Earth and eternal Kingdom of Heaven in virtue. The poem is put in a spacer piece of American and English Poetry, offering a "revelation of God's word" through the dust and beauty of the California trail.

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Biography

The author(s) didn't provide a biography.

Attachment: Page #11, which contains graphic designs of the poetry in the original English language and a translated version in a foreign language.

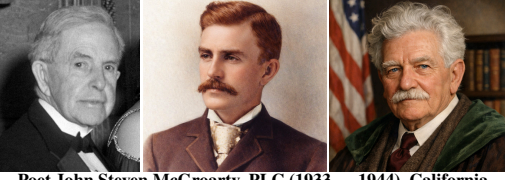
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Poet John Steven McGroarty, PLC (1933 — 1944), California
Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry for CA State of Arts Council.

রাজপথ

“এল ক্যামিনো রিয়েল”
—জন স্টিভেন ম্যাকগ্রোয়ার্টি

চলো ঘুরে আসি যেন সোনার হাওয়া ভরা—
রাজপথে তুমি-আমি একসাথে,
উপরে নীলাকাশ আর নীচে দরিয়ার আভা;
এটাই আমার গমন পথ তথা বহু চরাচরে।

বিশ্বের সুন্দরীতমা সূর্যের হাসিমাখা সুদীর্ঘ এই পথ—
চলে গেছে বরফ চাটায়ের কাঞ্চনজঙ্ঘা চূড়ার উর্ধ্ব,
অতঃপর এই পর্বতমালা থেকে কুঞ্জবনের সাজে,
জলের অতল তলে তথায় শঙ্খচিলেরা আসে।

সূর্যের হাসিমাখা সুদীর্ঘ এই পথ, প্রাচীন সুদীর্ঘ এই পথ,
মেশিশ্যদের জন্য বাদাবী গির্জার যাজকগণ নির্মাণ করেন এই পথ,
মূলত এটা নির্মিত হয়েছিল পাপী মানুষের জুতার পিষ্টনে,
তারা উন্মুক্ত ক্ষেত থেকে প্রেরিত হয় ঈশ্বরের গির্জাঘূহের-বেষ্টনে।

এটা নির্মিত হয়েছিল আদিম পাপে পাপী মানুষের জুতার পিষ্টনে,
সেই মেঘেরা এখন ছড়িয়ে-ছিটিয়ে আছে, মৃত্যু পুষে রাখে;
আজ তুমি-আমি একসাথে পাড়ি দেব এই পথ,
নাসারঞ্জে দম নিয়ে পাড়ি দেব এই রাজপথ।

সকালের সোনালী আভা অবগাহনে আমরা পথ চলবো সহমত,
তাদেরই স্বপ্ন দেখব যারা সুদূর-অতীতে প্রসন্ন করেছিল যাত্রাপদ,
সেইসব যাজকগণ যেখানে সমাহিত হয়েছেন সেইসব মিশনে থামব,
তাদের আত্মার শান্তির জন্য হাঁটু বেঁকে প্রার্থনা করব।

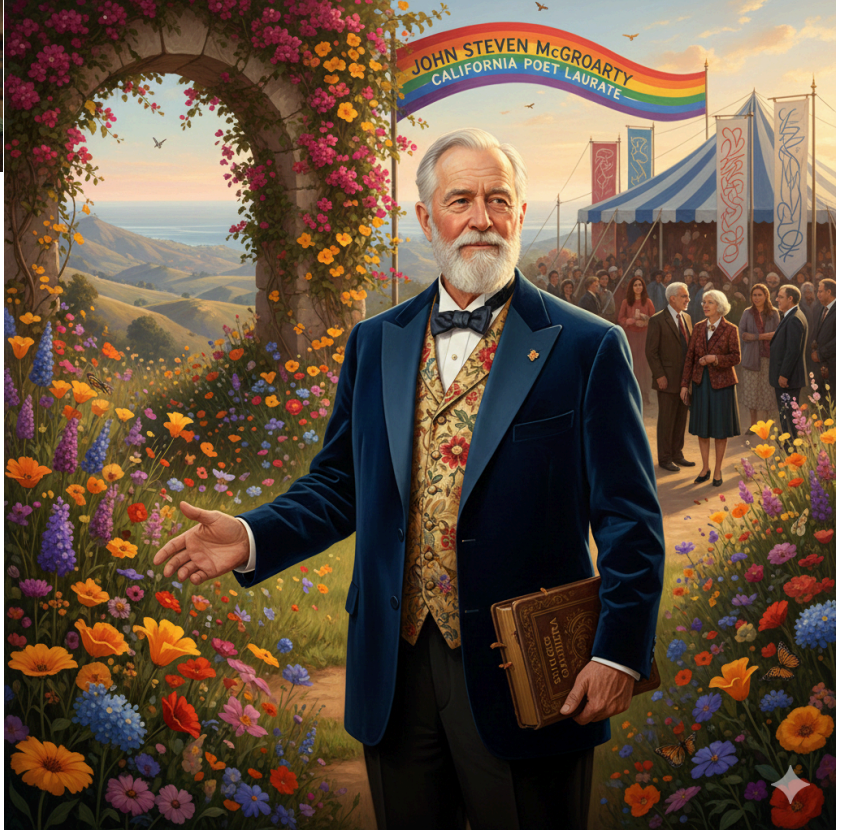
আমরা উপত্যকার মধ্যে দিয়ে চলবো যেখানে গাছে-গাছে ফুল ফুটেছে,
পাখি এবং মৌমাছদের সাথে নিয়ে যাবো বাগান আর তৃণভূমির মধ্য দিয়ে,
উর্ধ্বমুখী পাহাড়গুলিতে যাবো যেখানে বেড়ে ওঠে (বাতাবি ফল) মাঞ্জানিটা,
জলপ্রপাতের ধূসর প্রবাহ পেরিয়ে চলে যাবো যেথা ফোটে ভায়োলা সোরোরিয়া।

বর্ষীয়ান কংকোইস্তাদরেসগণ, হে বাদাবী পুরোহিতেরা এবং সকলে,
যখন রাত নামবে তখন তোমাদের ভূতদের পাঠিয়ো আমাদের সঙ্গ দেবে;
আজকে এটাই পরিভ্রমণের পথ তথা বহু চরাচরে,
আমাদের সম্পর্কে ঈশ্বরের বাক্যের প্রকাশ এই রাজপথে।

—অনুবাদঃ জেনারেল হ্যারি সেলডন, পিএইচডি।

Bengali translated by: GEN5 Dr. Hari Seldon Jr., GAF/61SX (USAF)
Chief Editor, US J Blogspot (ISSN: 3070-5630)
<http://www.en-page.blogspot.com>

Poetry Review of "The King's Highway: El Camino Real" by
John Steven McGroarty, PLC (1933 – 1944), California Poet
Laureate Consultant in Poetry for CA State of Arts Council.



The King's Highway "EL CAMINO REAL" —John Steven McGroarty

All in the golden weather, forth let us ride to-day,
You and I together, on the King's Highway,
The blue skies above us, and below the shining sea;
There's many a road to travel, but it's this road for me.

It's a long road and sunny, and the fairest in the world -
There are peaks that rise above it in their snowy mantles curled,
And it leads from the mountains through a hedge of chaparral,
Down to the waters where the sea gulls call.

It's a long road and sunny, it's a long road and old,
And the brown padres made it for the flocks of the fold;
They made it for the sandals of the sinner-folk that trod
From the fields in the open to the shelter-house of God.

They made it for the sandals of the sinner-folk of old;
Now the flocks they are scattered and death keeps the fold;
But you and I together we will take the road to-day,
With the breath in our nostrils, on the King's Highway.

We will take the road together through the morning's golden glow,
And we'll dream of those who trod it in the mellowed long ago;
We will stop at the Missions where the sleeping padres lay,
And we'll bend a knee above them for their souls' sake to pray.

We'll ride through the valleys where the blossom's on the tree,
Through the orchards and the meadows with the bird and the bee,
And we'll take the rising hills where the manzanitas grow,
Past the gray tails of waterfalls where blue violets blow.

Old Conquistadores, O brown priests and all,
Give us your ghosts for company when night begins to fall;
There's many a road to travel, but it's this road to-day,
With the breath of God about us on the King's Highway.

